

## Characters

- **Austin:** *early thirties, light blue sports shirt, light tan cardigan sweater, clean blue jeans, white tennis shoes*
- **Lee:** *his older brother, early forties, filthy white t-shirt, tattered brown overcoat covered with dust, dark blue baggy suit pants from the Salvation Army, pink suede belt, pointed black forties dress shoes scuffed up, holes in the soles, no socks, no hat, long pronounced sideburns, "Gene Vincent" hairdo, two days' growth of beard, bad teeth*
- **Saul Kimmer:** *late forties, Hollywood producer, pink and white flower print sports shirt, white sports coat with matching polyester slacks, black and white loafers*
- **Mom:** *early sixties, mother of the brothers, small woman, conservative white skirt and matching jacket, red shoulder bag, two pieces of matching red luggage*

**SCENE:** *All nine scenes take place on the same set; a kitchen and adjoining alcove of an older home in a Southern California suburb, about 40 miles east of Los Angeles. The kitchen takes up most of the playing area to stage left. The kitchen consists of a sink, upstage center, surrounded by counter space, a wall telephone, cupboards, and a small window just above it bordered by neat yellow curtains. Stage left of sink is a stove. Stage right, a refrigerator. The alcove adjoins the kitchen to stage right. There is no wall division or door to the alcove. It is open and easily accessible from the kitchen and defined only by the objects in it: a small round glass breakfast table mounted on white iron legs, two matching white iron chairs set across from each other. The two exterior walls of the alcove which prescribe a corner in the upstage right are composed of many small windows, beginning from a solid wall about three feet high and extending to the ceiling. The windows look out to bushes and citrus trees. The alcove is filled with all sorts of house plants in various pots, mostly Boston ferns hanging in planters at different levels. The floor of the alcove is composed of green synthetic grass.*

*All entrances and exits are made stage left from the kitchen. There is no door. The actors simply go off and come onto the playing area.*

**NOTE ON SET AND COSTUME:** *The set should be constructed realistically with no attempt to distort its dimensions, shapes, objects, or colors. No objects should be introduced which might draw special attention to themselves other than the props demanded by the script. If a stylistic "concept" is grafted onto the set design it will only serve to confuse the evolution of the characters' situation, which is the most important focus of the play.*

*Likewise, the costumes should be exactly representative of who the characters are and not added onto for the sake of making a point to the audience.*

**NOTE ON SOUND:** *The Coyote of Southern California has a distinct yapping, dog-like bark, similar to a Hyena. This yapping grows more intense and maniacal as the pack grows in numbers, which is usually the case when they lure and kill pets from suburban yards. The sense of growing frenzy in the pack should be felt in the background, particularly in Scenes 7 and 8. In any case, these Coyotes never make the long, mournful, solitary howl of the Hollywood stereotype.*

*The sound of Crickets can speak for itself.*

*These sounds should also be treated realistically even though they sometimes grow in volume and numbers.*

**Act 1****Act 1, Scene 1**

## ACT ONE: SCENE I

*Night. Sound of crickets in dark. Candlelight appears in alcove, illuminating AUSTIN, seated at glass table hunched over a writing notebook, pen in hand, cigarette burning in ashtray, cup of coffee, typewriter on table, stacks of paper, candle burning on table.*

*Soft moonlight fills kitchen illuminating LEE, beer in hand, six-pack on counter behind him. He's leaning against the sink, mildly drunk; takes a slug of beer.*

LEE

So, Mom took off for Alaska, huh?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

Sorta' left you in charge.

AUSTIN

Well, she knew I was coming down here so she offered me the place.

LEE

You keepin' the plants watered?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

Keepin' the sink clean? She don't like even a single tea leaf in the sink ya' know.

AUSTIN

*( trying to concentrate on writing)*

Yeah, I know.

*( pause)*

LEE

She gonna' be up there a long time?

AUSTIN

I don't know.

LEE

Kinda' nice for you, huh? Whole place to yourself.

AUSTIN

Yeah, it's great.

LEE

Ya' got crickets anyway. Tons a' crickets out there.

( *looks around kitchen* )

Ya' got groceries? Coffee?

AUSTIN

( *looking up from writing* )

What?

LEE

You got coffee?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

At's good.

( *short pause* )

Real coffee? From the bean?

AUSTIN

Yeah. You want some?

LEE

Naw. I brought some uh —

( *motions to beer* )

AUSTIN

Help yourself to whatever's —

( *motions to refrigerator* )

LEE

I will. Don't worry about me. I'm not the one to worry about. I mean I can uh —

( *pause* )

You always work by candlelight?

AUSTIN

No — uh — Not always.

LEE

Just sometimes?

AUSTIN

( *puts pen down, rubs his eyes* )

Yeah. Sometimes it's soothing.

LEE

Isn't that what the old guys did?

AUSTIN

What old guys?

LEE

The Forefathers. You know.

AUSTIN

Forefathers?

LEE

Isn't that what they did? Candlelight burning into the night? Cabins in the wilderness.

AUSTIN

(  *rubs hand through his hair* )

I suppose.

LEE

I'm not botherin' you am I? I mean I don't wanna break into yer uh — concentration or nothin'.

AUSTIN

No, it's all right.

LEE

That's good. I mean I realize that yer line a' work demands a lotta' concentration.

AUSTIN

It's okay.

LEE

You probably think that I'm not fully able to comprehend somethin' like that, huh?

AUSTIN

Like what?

LEE

That stuff yer doin'. That art. You know. Whatever you call it.

AUSTIN

It's just a little research.

LEE

You may not know it but I did a little art myself once.

AUSTIN

You did?

LEE

Yeah! I did some a' that. I fooled around with it. No future in it.

AUSTIN

What'd you do?

LEE

Never mind what I did! Just never mind about that.

( *pause* )

It was ahead of its time.

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

So, you went out to see the old man, huh?

LEE

Yeah, I seen him.

AUSTIN

How's he doing?

LEE

Same. He's doin' just about the same.

AUSTIN

I was down there too, you know.

LEE

What d'ya' want, an award? You want some kinda' medal? You were down there. He told me all about you.

AUSTIN

What'd he say?

LEE

He told me. Don't worry.

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

Well —

LEE

You don't have to say nothin'.

AUSTIN

I wasn't.

LEE

Yeah, you were gonna' make somethin' up. Somethin' brilliant.

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

You going to be down here very long, Lee?

LEE

Might be. Depends on a few things.

AUSTIN

You got some friends down here?

LEE

( *laughs* )

I know a few people. Yeah.

AUSTIN

Well, you can stay here as long as I'm here.

LEE

I don't need your permission do I?

AUSTIN

No.

LEE

I mean she's my mother too, right?

AUSTIN

Right.

LEE

She might've just as easily asked me to take care of her place as you.

AUSTIN

That's right.

LEE

I mean I know how to water plants.

( *long pause* )

AUSTIN

So you don't know how long you'll be staying then?

LEE

Depends mostly on houses, ya' know.

AUSTIN

Houses?

LEE

Yeah. Houses. Electric devices. Stuff like that. I gotta' make a little tour first.

( *short pause* )

AUSTIN

Lee, why don't you just try another neighborhood, all right?

LEE

( *laughs* )

What'sa' matter with this neighborhood? This is a  
great neighborhood. Lush. Good class a' people. Not many dogs.

AUSTIN

Well, our uh — Our mother just happens to live here. That's all.

LEE

Nobody's gonna' know. All they know is somethin's missing. That's all. She'll never even hear about it.  
Nobody's gonna' know.

AUSTIN

You're going to get picked up if you start walking around here at night.

LEE

Me? I'm gonna' git picked up? What about you? You stick out like a sore thumb. Look at you. You think yer  
regular lookin'?

AUSTIN

I've got too much to deal with here to be worrying about —

LEE

Yer not gonna' have to worry about me! I've been doin' all right without you. I haven't been anywhere near  
you for five years! Now isn't that true?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE



So you don't have to worry about me. I'm a free agent.

AUSTIN

All right.

LEE

Now all I wanna' do is borrow yer car.

AUSTIN

No!

LEE

Just fer a day. One day.

AUSTIN

No!

LEE

I won't take it outside a twenty mile radius. I promise ya'. You can check the speedometer.

AUSTIN

You're not borrowing my car! That's all there is to it.

( *pause* )

LEE

Then I'll just take the damn thing.

AUSTIN

Lee, look — I don't want any trouble, all right?

LEE

That's a dumb line. That is a dumb fuckin' line. You git paid fer dreamin' up a line like that?

AUSTIN

Look, I can give you some money if you need money.

(*LEE suddenly lunges at AUSTIN, grabs him violently by the shirt and shakes him with tremendous power*)

LEE

Don't you say that to me! Don't you ever say that to me!

*(just as suddenly he turns him loose, pushes him away and backs off)*

You may be able to git away with that with the Old Man. Git him tanked up for a week! Buy him off with yer Hollywood

blood money, but not me! I can git my own money my own way. Big money!

AUSTIN

I was just making an offer.

LEE

Yeah, well keep it to yourself!

*( long pause)*

Those are the most monotonous fuckin' crickets I ever heard in my life.

AUSTIN

I kinda' like the sound.

LEE

Yeah. Supposed to be able to tell the temperature by the number a' pulses. You believe that?

AUSTIN

The temperature?

LEE

Yeah. The air. How hot it is.

AUSTIN

How do you do that?

LEE

I don't know. Some woman told me that. She was a Botanist. So I believed her.

AUSTIN

Where'd you meet her?

LEE

What?

AUSTIN

The woman Botanist?

LEE

I met her on the desert. I been spendin' a lotta' time on the desert.

AUSTIN

What were you doing out there?

LEE

*( pause, stares in space )*

I forgit. Had me a Pit Bull there for a while but I lost him.

AUSTIN

Pit Bull?

LEE

Fightin' dog. Damn I made some good money off that little dog. Real good money.

*( pause )*

AUSTIN

You could come up north with me, you know.

LEE

What's up there?

AUSTIN

My family.

LEE

Oh, that's right, you got the wife and kiddies now don't ya'. The house, the car, the whole slam. That's right.

AUSTIN

You could spend a couple days. See how you like it. I've got an extra room.

LEE

Too cold up there.

*( pause )*

AUSTIN

You want to sleep for a while?

LEE

( *pause, stares at AUSTIN* )

I don't sleep.

( *lights to black* )

## **Act 1, Scene 2**

### **SCENE 2**

*Morning. AUSTIN is watering plants with a vaporizer; LEE sits at glass table in alcove drinking beer.*

LEE

I never realized the old lady was so security-minded.

AUSTIN

How do you mean?

LEE

Made a little tour this morning. She's got locks on everything. Locks and double-locks and chain locks and — What's she got that's so valuable?

AUSTIN

Antiques I guess. I don't know.

LEE

Antiques? Brought everything with her from the old place, huh. Just the same crap we always had around. Plates and spoons.

AUSTIN

I guess they have personal value to her.

LEE

Personal value. Yeah. Just a lotta' junk. Most of it's phony anyway. Idaho decals. Now who in the hell wants to eat offa' plate with the State of Idaho starin' ya' in the face. Every time ya' take a bite ya' get to see a little bit more.

AUSTIN

Well it must mean something to her or she wouldn't save it.

LEE

Yeah, well personally I don't wann' be invaded by Idaho when I'm eatin'. When I'm eatin' I'm home. Ya' know what I'm sayin'? I'm not driftin', I'm home. I don't need my thoughts swept off to Idaho. I don't need that!

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

Did you go out last night?

LEE

Why?

AUSTIN

I thought I heard you go out.

LEE

Yeah, I went out. What about it?

AUSTIN

Just wondered.

LEE

Damn coyotes kept me awake.

AUSTIN

Oh yeah, I heard them. They must've killed somebody's dog or something.

LEE

Yappin' their fool heads off. They don't yap like that on the desert. They howl. These are city coyotes here.

AUSTIN

Well, you don't sleep anyway do you?

( *pause, LEE stares at him* )

LEE

You're pretty smart aren't ya?

AUSTIN

How do you mean?

LEE

I mean you never had any more on the ball than I did. But here you are gettin' invited into prominent people's houses. Sittin' around talkin' like you know somethin'.

AUSTIN

They're not so prominent.

LEE

They're a helluva' lot more prominent than the houses I get invited into.

AUSTIN

Well you invite yourself.

LEE

That's right. I do. In fact I probably got a wider range a' choices than you do, come to think of it.

AUSTIN

I wouldn't doubt it.

LEE

In fact I been inside some pretty classy places in my time. And I never even went to an Ivy League school either.

AUSTIN

You want some breakfast or something?

LEE

Breakfast?

AUSTIN

Yeah. Don't you eat breakfast?

LEE

Look, don't worry about me pal. I can take care a' myself. You just go ahead as though I wasn't even here, all right?

(AUSTIN goes into kitchen, makes coffee)

AUSTIN

Where'd you walk to last night?

( pause)

LEE

I went up in the foothills there. Up in the San Gabriels. Heat was drivin' me crazy.

AUSTIN

Well, wasn't it hot out on the desert?

LEE

Different kinda' heat. Out there it's clean. Cools off at night. There's a nice little breeze.

AUSTIN

Where were you, the Mojave?

LEE

Yeah. The Mojave. That's right.

AUSTIN

I haven't been out there in years.

LEE

Out past Needles there.

AUSTIN

Oh yeah.

LEE

Up here it's different. This country's real different.

AUSTIN

Well, it's been built up.

LEE

Built up? Wiped out is more like it. I don't even hardly recognize it.

AUSTIN

Yeah. Foothills are the same though, aren't they?

LEE

Pretty much. It's funny goin' up in there. The smells and everything. Used to catch snakes up there, remember?

AUSTIN

You caught snakes.

LEE

Yeah. And you'd pretend you were Geronimo or some damn thing. You used to go right out to lunch.

AUSTIN

I enjoyed my imagination.

LEE

That what you call it? Looks like yer still enjoyin' it.

AUSTIN

So you just wandered around up there, huh?

LEE

Yeah. With a purpose.

AUSTIN

See any houses?

( *pause* )

LEE

Couple. Couple a' real nice ones. One of 'em didn't even have a dog. Walked right up and stuck my head in the window. Not a peep. Just a sweet kinda' suburban silence.

AUSTIN

What kind of a place was it?

LEE

Like a paradise. Kinda' place that sorta' kills ya' inside. Warm yellow lights. Mexican tile all around. Copper pots hangin' over the stove. Ya' know like they got in the magazines. Blonde people movin' in and outa' the rooms, talkin' to each other.

( *pause* )

Kinda' place you wish you sorta' grew up in, ya' know.

AUSTIN

That's the kind of place you wish you'd grown up in?

LEE

Yeah, why not?



AUSTIN

I thought you hated that kind of stuff.

LEE

Yeah, well you never knew too much about me did ya'?

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

Why'd you go out to the desert in the first place?

LEE

I was on my way to see the old man.

AUSTIN

You mean you just passed through there?

LEE

Yeah. That's right. Three months of passin' through.

AUSTIN

Three months?

LEE

Somethin' like that. Maybe more. Why?

AUSTIN

You lived on the Mojave for three months?

LEE

Yeah. What'sa' matter with that?

AUSTIN

By yourself?

LEE

Mostly. Had a couple a' visitors. Had that dog for a while.

AUSTIN

Didn't you miss people?

LEE

( *laughs* )

People?

AUSTIN

Yeah. I mean I go crazy if I have to spend three nights in a motel by myself.

LEE

Yer not in a motel now.

AUSTIN

No, I know. But sometimes I have to stay in motels.

LEE

Well, they got people in motels don't they?

AUSTIN

Strangers.

LEE

Yer friendly aren't ya'? Aren't you the friendly type?

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

I'm going to have somebody coming by here later, Lee.

LEE

Ah! Lady friend?

AUSTIN

No, a producer.

LEE

Aha! What's he produce?

AUSTIN

Film. Movies. You know.

LEE

Oh, movies. Motion Pictures! A Big Wig huh?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

What's he comin' by here for?

AUSTIN

We have to talk about a project.

LEE

Whadya' mean, "a project"? What's "a project"?

AUSTIN

A script.

LEE

Oh. That's what yer doin' with all these papers?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

Well, what's the project about?

AUSTIN

We're uh — it's a period piece.

LEE

What's "a period piece"?

AUSTIN

Look, it doesn't matter. The main thing is we need to discuss this alone. I mean —

LEE

Oh, I get it. You want me outa' the picture.

AUSTIN

Not exactly. I just need to be alone with him for a couple of hours. So we can talk.

LEE

Yer afraid I'll embarrass ya' huh?

AUSTIN

I'm not afraid you'll embarrass me!

LEE

Well, I tell ya' what — Why don't you just gimme the keys to yer car and I'll be back here around six o'clock or so. That give ya' enough time?

AUSTIN

I'm not loaning you my car, Lee.

LEE

You want me to just git lost huh? Take a hike? Is that it? Pound the pavement for a few hours while you bullshit yer way into a million bucks.

AUSTIN

Look, it's going to be hard enough for me to face this character on my own without —

LEE

You don't know this guy?

AUSTIN

No I don't know — He's a producer. I mean I've been meeting with him for months but you never get to know a producer.

LEE

Yer tryin' to hustle him? Is that it?

AUSTIN

I'm not trying to hustle him! I'm trying to work out a deal! It's not easy.

LEE

What kinda' deal?

AUSTIN

Convince him it's a worthwhile story.

LEE

He's not convinced? How come he's comin' over here if he's not convinced? I'll convince him for ya'.

AUSTIN

You don't understand the way things work down here.

LEE

How do things work down here?

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

Look, if I loan you my car will you have it back here by six?

LEE

On the button. With a full tank a' gas.

AUSTIN

( *digging in his pocket for keys* )

Forget about the gas.

LEE

Hey, these days gas is gold, old buddy.

(AUSTIN *hands the keys to* LEE)

You remember that car I used to loan you?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

Forty Ford. Flathead.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

Sucker hauled ass didn't it?

AUSTIN

Lee, it's not that I don't want to loan you my car —

LEE

You are loanin' me yer car.

(LEE gives AUSTIN a pat on the shoulder, pause)

AUSTIN

I know. I just wish —

LEE

What? You wish what?

AUSTIN

I don't know. I wish I wasn't — I wish I didn't have to be doing business down here. I'd like to just spend some time with you.

LEE

I thought it was "Art" you were doin'.

(LEE moves across kitchen toward exit, tosses keys in his hand)

AUSTIN

Try to get it back here by six, okay?

LEE

No sweat. Hey, ya' know, if that uh — story of yours

doesn't go over with the guy — tell him I got a couple a' "projects" he might be interested in. Real commercial. Full a' suspense. True-to-life stuff.

(LEE exits, AUSTIN stares after LEE then turns, goes to papers at table, leafs through pages, lights fade to black)

### **Act 1, Scene 3**

#### **SCENE 3**

*Afternoon. Alcove, SAUL KIMMER and AUSTIN seated across from each other at table.*

SAUL KIMMER

Well, to tell you the truth Austin, I have never felt so confident about a project in quite a long time.

AUSTIN

Well, that's good to hear, Saul.

SAUL KIMMER

I am absolutely convinced we can get this thing off the ground. I mean we'll have to make a sale to television and that means getting a major star. Somebody bankable. But I think we can do it. I really do.

AUSTIN

Don't you think we need a first draft before we approach a star?

SAUL KIMMER

No, no, not at all. I don't think it's necessary. Maybe a brief synopsis. I don't want you to touch the typewriter until we have some seed money.

AUSTIN

That's fine with me.

SAUL KIMMER

I mean it's a great story. Just the story alone. You've really managed to capture something this time.

AUSTIN

I'm glad you like it, Saul.

*(LEE enters abruptly into kitchen carrying a stolen television set, short pause)*

LEE

Aw shit, I'm sorry about that. I am really sorry Austin.

AUSTIN

*( standing)*

That's all right.

LEE

*( moving toward them)*

I mean I thought it was way past six already. You said to have it back here by six.

AUSTIN

We were just finishing up.

*( to Saul)*

This is my, uh — brother, Lee.

SAUL KIMMER

( *standing* )

Oh, I'm very happy to meet you.

(LEE *sets T' V' on sink counter, shakes hands with SAUL*)

LEE

I can't tell ya' how happy I am to meet you sir.

SAUL KIMMER

Saul Kimmer.

LEE

Mr' Kipper.

SAUL KIMMER

Kimmer.

AUSTIN

Lee's been living out on the desert and he just uh —

SAUL KIMMER

Oh, that's terrific!

( *to LEE* )

Palm Springs?

LEE

Yeah. Yeah, right. Right around in that area. Near uh — Bob Hope Drive there.

SAUL KIMMER

Oh I love it out there. I just love it. The air is wonderful.

LEE

Yeah. Sure is. Healthy.

SAUL KIMMER

And the golf. I don't know if you play golf, but the golf is just about the best.

LEE

I play a lotta' golf.



SAUL KIMMER

Is that right?

LEE

Yeah. In fact I was hoping I'd run into somebody out here who played a little golf. I've been lookin' for a partner.

SAUL KIMMER

Well, I uh —

AUSTIN

Lee's just down for a visit while our mother's in Alaska.

SAUL KIMMER

Oh, your mother's in Alaska?

AUSTIN

Yes. She went up there on a little vacation. This is her place.

SAUL KIMMER

I see. Well isn't that something. Alaska.

LEE

What kinda' handicap do ya' have, Mr' Kimmer?

SAUL KIMMER

Oh I'm just a Sunday duffer really. You know.

LEE

That's good 'cause I haven't swung a club in months.

SAUL KIMMER

Well we ought to get together sometime and have a little game. Austin, do you play?

(SAUL *mimes a Johnny Carson golf swing* for AUSTIN)

AUSTIN

No. I don't uh — I've watched it on T`V`

LEE

( *to SAUL* )

How 'bout tomorrow morning? Bright and early. We could get out there and put in eighteen holes before breakfast.

SAUL KIMMER

Well, I've got uh — I have several appointments —

LEE

No, I mean real early. Crack a'dawn. While the dew's still thick on the fairway.

SAUL KIMMER

Sounds really great.

LEE

Austin could be our caddie.

SAUL KIMMER

Now that's an idea.

( *laughs* )

AUSTIN

I don't know the first thing about golf.

LEE

There's nothin' to it. Isn't that right, Saul? He'd pick it up in fifteen minutes.

SAUL KIMMER

Sure. Doesn't take long. 'Course you have to play for years to find your true form.

( *chuckles* )

LEE

( *to AUSTIN* )

We'll give ya' a quick run-down on the club faces. The irons, the woods. Show ya' a couple pointers on the basic swing. Might even let ya' hit the ball a couple times. Whadya' think, Saul?

SAUL KIMMER

Why not. I think it'd be great. I haven't had any exercise in weeks.

LEE

'At's the spirit! We'll have a little orange juice right afterwards.

( *pause* )

SAUL KIMMER

Orange juice?

LEE

Yeah! Vitamin C! Nothin' like a shot a' orange juice after a round a' golf. Hot shower. Snappin' towels at each others' privates. Real sense a' fraternity.

SAUL KIMMER

( *smiles at AUSTIN* )

Well, you make it sound very inviting, I must say. It really does sound great.

LEE

Then it's a date.

SAUL KIMMER

Well, I'll call the country club and see if I can arrange something.

LEE

Great! Boy, I sure am sorry that I busted in on ya' all in the middle of yer meeting.

SAUL KIMMER

Oh that's quite all right. We were just about finished anyway.

LEE

I can wait out in the other room if you want.

SAUL KIMMER

No really —

LEE

Just got Austin's color T`V` back from the shop. I can watch a little amateur boxing now.

( *LEE and AUSTIN exchange looks* )

SAUL KIMMER

Oh — Yes.

LEE

You don't fool around in Television, do you Saul?

SAUL KIMMER

Uh — I have in the past. Produced some T`V` Specials. Network stuff. But it's mainly features now.

LEE

That's where the big money is, huh?

SAUL KIMMER

Yes. That's right.

AUSTIN

Why don't I call you tomorrow, Saul and we'll get together. We can have lunch or something.

SAUL KIMMER

That'd be terrific.

LEE

Right after the golf.

( *pause* )

SAUL KIMMER

What?

LEE

You can have lunch right after the golf.

SAUL KIMMER

Oh, right.

LEE

Austin was tellin' me that yer interested in stories.

SAUL KIMMER

Well, we develop certain projects that we feel have commercial potential.

LEE

What kinda' stuff do ya' go in for?

SAUL KIMMER

Oh, the usual. You know. Good love interest. Lots of action.

( *chuckles at AUSTIN* )

LEE

Westerns?

SAUL KIMMER

Sometimes.

AUSTIN

I'll give you a ring, Saul.

(AUSTIN *tries to move SAUL across the kitchen but LEE blocks their way*)

LEE

I got a Western that'd knock yer lights out.

SAUL KIMMER

Oh really?

LEE

Yeah. Contemporary Western. Based on a true story. 'Course I'm not a writer like my brother here. I'm not a man of the pen.

SAUL KIMMER

Well —

LEE

I mean I can tell ya' a story off the tongue but I can't put it down on paper. That don't make any difference though does it?

SAUL KIMMER

No, not really.

LEE

I mean plenty a' guys have stories don't they? True-life stories. Musta' been a lotta' movies made from real life.

SAUL KIMMER

Yes. I suppose so.

LEE

I haven't seen a good Western since "Lonely Are the Brave." You remember that movie?

SAUL KIMMER

No, I'm afraid I —

LEE

Kirk Douglas. Helluva' movie. You remember that movie, Austin?

AUSTIN

Yes.

LEE

( *to SAUL* )

The man dies for the love of a horse.

SAUL KIMMER

Is that right.

LEE

Yeah. Ya' hear the horse screamin' at the end of it. Rain's comin' down. Horse is screamin'. Then there's a shot. BLAM! Just a single shot like that. Then nothin' but the sound of

rain. And Kirk Douglas is ridin' in the ambulance. Ridin' away from the scene of the accident. And when he hears that shot he knows that his horse has died. He knows. And you see his eyes. And his eyes die. Right inside his face. And then his eyes close. And you know that he's died too. You know that Kirk Douglas has died from the death of his horse.

SAUL KIMMER

( *eyes AUSTIN nervously* )

Well, it sounds like a great movie. I'm sorry I missed it.

LEE

Yeah, you shouldn't a' missed that one.

SAUL KIMMER

I'll have to try to catch it some time. Arrange a screening or something. Well, Austin, I'll have to hit the freeway before rush hour.

AUSTIN

( *ushers him toward exit* )

It's good seeing you, Saul.

( *AUSTIN and SAUL shake hands* )

LEE

So ya' think there's room for a real Western these days? A true-to-life Western?

SAUL KIMMER

Well, I don't see why not. Why don't you uh — tell the story to Austin and have him write a little outline.

LEE

You'd take a look at it then?

SAUL KIMMER

Yes. Sure. I'll give it a read-through. Always eager for new material.

( *smiles at AUSTIN* )

LEE

That's great! You'd really read it then huh?

SAUL KIMMER

It would just be my opinion of course.

LEE

That's all I want. Just an opinion. I happen to think it has a lotta' possibilities.

SAUL KIMMER

Well, it was great meeting you and I'll —

(SAUL *and* LEE *shake*)

LEE

I'll call you tomorrow about the golf.

SAUL KIMMER

Oh. Yes, right.

LEE

Austin's got your number, right?

SAUL KIMMER

Yes.

LEE

So long Saul.

( gives SAUL a pat on the back)

(SAUL exits, AUSTIN turns to LEE, looks at T`V` then back to LEE)

AUSTIN

Give me the keys.

(AUSTIN extends his hand toward LEE, LEE doesn't move, just stares at AUSTIN, smiles, lights to black)

## Act 1, Scene 4

### SCENE 4

*Night. Coyotes in distance, fade, sound of typewriter in dark, crickets, candlelight in alcove, dim light in kitchen, lights reveal AUSTIN at glass table typing, LEE sits across from him, foot on table, drinking beer and whiskey, the T`V` is still on sink counter, AUSTIN types for a while, then stops.*

LEE

All right, now read it back to me.

AUSTIN

I'm not reading it back to you, Lee. You can read it when we're finished. I can't spend all night on this.

LEE

You got better things to do?

AUSTIN

Let's just go ahead. Now what happens when he leaves Texas?

LEE

Is he ready to leave Texas yet? I didn't know we were that far along. He's not ready to leave Texas.

AUSTIN

He's right at the border.

LEE

( sitting up)

No, see this is one a' the crucial parts. Right here.

( taps paper with beer can)

We can't rush through this. He's not right at the border. He's a good fifty miles from the border. A lot can happen in fifty miles.



AUSTIN

It's only an outline. We're not writing an entire script now.

LEE

Well ya' can't leave things out even if it is an outline. It's one a' the most important parts. Ya' can't go leavin' it out.

AUSTIN

Okay, okay. Let's just — get it done.

LEE

All right. Now. He's in the truck and he's got his horse trailer and his horse.

AUSTIN

We've already established that.

LEE

And he sees this other guy comin' up behind him in another truck. And that truck is pullin' a gooseneck.

AUSTIN

What's a gooseneck?

LEE

Cattle trailer. You know the kind with a gooseneck, goes right down in the bed a' the pick-up.

AUSTIN

Oh. All right.

( *types* )

LEE

Is important.

AUSTIN

Okay. I got it.

LEE

All these details are important.

(AUSTIN *types as they talk*)

AUSTIN

I've got it.

LEE

And this other guy's got his horse all saddled up in the back a' the gooseneck.

AUSTIN

Right.

LEE

So both these guys have got their horses right along with 'em, see.

AUSTIN

I understand.

LEE

Then this first guy suddenly realizes two things.

AUSTIN

The guy in front?

LEE

Right. The guy in front realizes two things almost at the same time. Simultaneous.

AUSTIN

What were the two things?

LEE

Number one, he realizes that the guy behind him is the husband of the woman he's been —

*(LEE makes gesture of screwing by pumping his arm)*

AUSTIN

*( Sees LEE'S gesture)*

Oh. Yeah.

LEE

And number two, he realizes he's in the middle of Tornado Country.

AUSTIN

What's "Tornado Country"?

LEE

Panhandle.

AUSTIN

Panhandle?

LEE

Sweetwater. Around in that area. Nothin'. Nowhere. And number three —

AUSTIN

I thought there was only two.

LEE

There's three. There's a third unforeseen realization.

AUSTIN

And what's that?

LEE

That he's runnin' outa' gas.

AUSTIN

( *stops typing* )

Come on, Lee.

(AUSTIN *gets up, moves to kitchen, gets a glass of water*)

LEE

Whadya' mean, "come on"? That's what it is. Write it down! He's runnin' outa' gas.

AUSTIN

It's too —

LEE

What? It's too what? It's too real! That's what ya' mean isn't it? It's too much like real life!

AUSTIN

It's not like real life! It's not enough like real life. Things don't happen like that.

LEE

What! Men don't fuck other men's women?

AUSTIN

Yes. But they don't end up chasing each other across the Panhandle. Through "Tornado Country."

LEE

They do in this movie!

AUSTIN

And they don't have horses conveniently along with them when they run out of gas! And they don't run out of gas either!

LEE

These guys run outa' gas! This is my story and one a' these guys runs outa' gas!

AUSTIN

It's just a dumb excuse to get them into a chase scene. It's contrived.

LEE

It is a chase scene! It's already a chase scene. They been chasin' each other fer days.

AUSTIN

So now they're supposed to abandon their trucks, climb on their horses and chase each other into the mountains?

LEE

( *standing suddenly*)

There aren't any mountains in the Panhandle! It's flat!

(*LEE turns violently toward windows in alcove and throws beer can at them*)

LEE

Goddamn these crickets!

( *yells at crickets*)

Shut up out there!

( *pause, turns back toward table*)

This place is like a fuckin' rest home here. How're you supposed to think!

AUSTIN

You wanna' take a break?

LEE

No, I don't wanna' take a break! I wanna' get this done! This is my last chance to get this done.

AUSTIN

( *moves back into alcove* )

All right. Take it easy.

LEE

I'm gonna' be leavin' this area. I don't have time to mess around here.

AUSTIN

Where are you going?

LEE

Never mind where I'm goin'! That's got nothin' to do with you. I just gotta' get this done. I'm not like you. Hangin' around bein' a parasite offa' other fools. I gotta' do this thing and get out.

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

A parasite? Me?

LEE

Yeah, you!

AUSTIN

After you break into people's houses and take their televisions?

LEE

They don't need their televisions! I'm doin' them a service.

AUSTIN

Give me back my keys, Lee.

LEE

Not until you write this thing! You're gonna' write this outline thing for me or that car's gonna' wind up in Arizona with a different paint job.

AUSTIN

You think you can force me to write this? I was doing you a favor.

LEE

Git off yer high horse will ya! Favor! Big favor. Handin' down favors from the mountain top.

AUSTIN

Let's just write it, okay? Let's sit down and not get upset and see if we can just get through this.

(AUSTIN *sits at typewriter*)

( *long pause*)

LEE

Yer not gonna' even show it to him, are ya'?

AUSTIN

What?

LEE

This outline. You got no intention of showin' it to him. Yer just doin' this 'cause yer afraid a' me.

AUSTIN

You can show it to him yourself.

LEE

I will, boy! I'm gonna' read it to him on the golf course.

AUSTIN

And I'm not afraid of you either.

LEE

Then how come yer doin' it?

AUSTIN

( *pause*)

So I can get my keys back.

( *pause as LEE takes keys out of his pocket slowly and throws them on table, long pause, AUSTIN stares at keys*)

LEE

There. Now you got yer keys back.

(AUSTIN *looks up at LEE but doesn't take keys*)

LEE

Go ahead. There's yer keys.

(AUSTIN *slowly takes keys off table and puts them back in his own pocket*)

Now what're you gonna' do? Kick me out?

AUSTIN

I'm not going to kick you out, Lee.

LEE

You couldn't kick me out, boy.

AUSTIN

I know.

LEE

So you can't even consider that one.

(*pause*)

You could call the police. That'd be the obvious thing.

AUSTIN

You're my brother.

LEE

That don't mean a thing. You go down to the L'A' Police Department there and ask them what kinda' people kill each other the most. What do you think they'd say?

AUSTIN

Who said anything about killing?

LEE

Family people. Brothers. Brothers-in-law. Cousins. Real American-type people. They kill each other in the heat mostly. In the Smog-Alerts. In the Brush Fire Season. Right about this time a' year.

AUSTIN

This isn't the same.

LEE

Oh no? What makes it different?

AUSTIN

We're not insane. We're not driven to acts of violence like that. Not over a dumb movie script. Now sit down.

*( long pause, LEE considers which way to go with it)*

LEE

Maybe not.

*( he sits back down at table across from AUSTIN)*

Maybe you're right. Maybe we're too intelligent, huh?

*( pause)*

We got our heads on our shoulders. One of us has even got a Ivy League diploma. Now that means somethin' don't it? Doesn't that mean somethin'?

AUSTIN

Look, I'll write this thing for you, Lee. I don't mind writing it. I just don't want to get all worked up about it. It's not worth it. Now, come on. Let's just get through it, okay?

LEE

Nah. I think there's easier money. Lotsa' places I could pick up thousands. Maybe millions. I don't need this shit. I could go up to Sacramento Valley and steal me a diesel. Ten thousand a week dismantling one a' those suckers. Ten thousand a week!

*(LEE opens another beer, puts his foot back up on table)*

AUSTIN

No, really, look, I'll write it out for you. I think it's a great idea.

LEE

Nah, you got yer own work to do. I don't wanna' interfere with yer life.

AUSTIN

I mean it'd be really fantastic if you could sell this. Turn it into a movie. I mean it.



( *pause* )

LEE

Ya' think so huh?

AUSTIN

Absolutely. You could really turn your life around, you know. Change things.

LEE

I could get me a house maybe.

AUSTIN

Sure you could get a house. You could get a whole ranch if you wanted to.

LEE

( *laughs* )

A ranch? I could get a ranch?

AUSTIN

'Course you could. You know what a screenplay sells for these days?

LEE

No. What's it sell for?

AUSTIN

A lot. A whole lot of money.

LEE

Thousands?

AUSTIN

Yeah. Thousands.

LEE

Millions?

AUSTIN

Well —

LEE

We could get the old man outa' hock then.

AUSTIN

Maybe.

LEE

Maybe? Whadya' mean, maybe?

AUSTIN

I mean it might take more than money.

LEE

You were just tellin' me it'd change my whole life around. Why wouldn't it change his?

AUSTIN

He's different.

LEE

Oh, he's of a different ilk huh?

AUSTIN

He's not gonna' change. Let's leave the old man out of it.

LEE

That's right. He's not gonna' change but I will. I'll just turn myself right inside out. I could be just like you then, huh? Sittin' around dreamin' stuff up. Gettin' paid to dream. Ridin' back and forth on the freeway just dreamin' my fool head off.

AUSTIN

It's not all that easy.

LEE

It's not, huh?

AUSTIN

No. There's a lot of work involved.

LEE

What's the toughest part? Deciding whether to jog or play tennis?

( *long pause* )

AUSTIN

Well, look. You can stay here — do whatever you want to. Borrow the car. Come in and out. Doesn't matter to me. It's not my house. I'll help you write this thing or — not. Just let me know what you want. You tell me.

LEE

Oh. So now suddenly you're at my service. Is that it?

AUSTIN

What do you want to do Lee?

*( long pause, LEE stares at him then turns and dreams at windows)*

LEE

I tell ya' what I'd do if I still had that dog. Ya' wanna' know what I'd do?

AUSTIN

What?

LEE

Head out to Ventura. Cook up a little match. God that little dog could bear down. Lota' money in dog fightin'. Big money.

*( pause)*

AUSTIN

Why don't we try to see this through, Lee. Just for the hell of it. Maybe you've really got something here. What do you think?

*( pause, LEE considers)*

LEE

Maybe so. No harm in tryin' I guess. You think it's such a hot idea. Besides, I always wondered what'd be like to be you.

AUSTIN

You did?

LEE

Yeah, sure. I used to picture you walkin' around some campus with yer arms fulla' books. Blondes chasin' after ya'.

AUSTIN

Blondes? That's funny.

LEE

What's funny about it?

AUSTIN

Because I always used to picture you somewhere.

LEE

Where'd you picture me?

AUSTIN

Oh, I don't know. Different places. Adventures. You were always on some adventure.

LEE

Yeah.

AUSTIN

And I used to say to myself, "Lee's got the right idea. He's out there in the world and here I am. What am I doing?"

LEE

Well you were settin' yourself up for somethin'.

AUSTIN

I guess.

LEE

We better get started on this thing then.

AUSTIN

Okay.

(AUSTIN *sits up at typewriter, puts new paper in*)

LEE

Oh. Can I get the keys back before I forget?

(AUSTIN *hesitates*)

You said I could borrow the car if I wanted, right? Isn't that what you said?

AUSTIN

Yeah. Right.

*(AUSTIN takes keys out of his pocket, sets them on table, LEE takes keys slowly, plays with them in his hand)*

LEE

I could get a ranch, huh?

AUSTIN

Yeah. We have to write it first though.

LEE

Okay. Let's write it.

*( lights start dimming slowly to end of scene as AUSTIN types, LEE speaks)*

So they take off after each other straight into an endless black prairie. The sun is just comin' down and they can feel the night on their backs. What they don't know is that each one of 'em is afraid, see. Each one separately thinks that he's the only one that's afraid. And they keep ridin' like that straight into the night. Not knowing. And the one who's chasin' doesn't know where the other one is taking him. And the one who's being chased doesn't know where he's going.

*( lights to black, typing stops in the dark, crickets fade)*

## Act 2

### Act 2, Scene 1

#### ACT TWO: SCENE 5

*Morning. LEE at the table in alcove with a set of golf clubs in a fancy leather bag, AUSTIN at sink washing a few dishes.*

AUSTIN

He really liked it, huh?

LEE

He wouldn't a' gave me these clubs if he didn't like it.

AUSTIN

He gave you the clubs?

LEE

Yeah. I told ya' he gave me the clubs. The bag too.

AUSTIN

I thought he just loaned them to you.

LEE

He said it was part a' the advance. A little gift like. Gesture of his good faith.

AUSTIN

He's giving you an advance?

LEE

Now what's so amazing about that? I told ya' it was a good story. You even said it was a good story.

AUSTIN

Well that is really incredible Lee. You know how many guys spend their whole lives down here trying to break into this business? Just trying to get in the door?

LEE

*(pulling clubs out of bag, testing them)*

I got no idea. How many?

*(pause)*

AUSTIN

How much of an advance is he giving you?

LEE

Plenty. We were talkin' big money out there. Ninth hole is where I sealed the deal.

AUSTIN

He made a firm commitment?

LEE

Absolutely.

AUSTIN

Well, I know Saul and he doesn't fool around when he says he likes something.

LEE

I thought you said you didn't know him.

AUSTIN

Well, I'm familiar with his tastes.

LEE

I let him get two up on me goin' into the back nine. He was sure he had me cold. You shoulda' seen his face when I pulled out the old pitching wedge and plopped it pin-high, two feet from the cup. He 'bout shit his pants. "Where'd a guy like you ever learn how to play golf like that?" he says.

*(LEE laughs, AUSTIN stares at him)*

AUSTIN

'Course there's no contract yet. Nothing's final until it's on paper.

LEE

It's final, all right. There's no way he's gonna' back out of it now. We gambled for it.

AUSTIN

Saul, gambled?

LEE

Yeah, sure. I mean he liked the outline already so he wasn't risking that much. I just guaranteed it with my short game.

*(pause)*

AUSTIN

Well, we should celebrate or something. I think Mom left a bottle of champagne in the refrigerator. We should have a little toast.

*(AUSTIN gets glasses from cupboard, goes to refrigerator, pulls out bottle of champagne)*

LEE

You shouldn't oughta' take her champagne, Austin. She's gonna' miss that.

AUSTIN

Oh, she's not going to mind. She'd be glad we put it to good use. I'll get her another bottle. Besides, it's perfect for the occasion.

*(pause)*

LEE

Yer gonna' get a nice fee fer writin' the script a' course. Straight fee.

(AUSTIN *stops, stares at LEE, puts glasses and bottle on table, pause*)

AUSTIN

I'm writing the script?

LEE

That's what he said. Said we couldn't hire a better screen-writer in the whole town.

AUSTIN

But I'm already working on a script. I've got my own project. I don't have time to write two scripts.

LEE

No, he said he was gonna' drop that other one.

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

What? You mean mine? He's going to drop mine and do yours instead?

LEE

( *smiles* )

Now look, Austin, it's jest beginner's luck ya' know. I mean I sank a fifty foot putt for this deal. No hard feelings.

(AUSTIN *goes to phone on wall, grabs it. starts dialing*)

He's not gonna' be in, Austin. Told me he wouldn't be in 'till late this afternoon.

AUSTIN

( *stays on phone, dialing, listens* )

I can't believe this. I just can't believe it. Are you sure he said that? Why would he drop mine?

LEE

That's what he told me.

AUSTIN

He can't do that without telling me first. Without talking to me at least. He wouldn't just make a decision like



that without talking to me!

LEE

Well I was kinda' surprised myself. But he was real enthusiastic about my story.

(AUSTIN *hangs up phone violently, paces*)

AUSTIN

What'd he say! Tell me everything he said!

LEE

I been tellin' ya! He said he liked the story a whole lot. It was the first authentic Western to come along in a decade.

AUSTIN

He liked that story! Your story?

LEE

Yeah! What's so surprisin' about that?

AUSTIN

It's stupid! It's the dumbest story I ever heard in my life.

LEE

Hey, hold on! That's my story yer talkin' about!

AUSTIN

It's a bullshit story! It's idiotic. Two lamebrains chasing each other across Texas! Are you kidding? Who do you think's going to go see a film like that?

LEE

It's not a film! It's a movie. There's a big difference. That's somethin' Saul told me.

AUSTIN

Oh he did, huh?

LEE

Yeah, he said, "In this business we make movies, American movies. Leave the films to the French."

AUSTIN

So you got real intimate with old Saul huh? He started pouring forth his vast knowledge of Cinema.

LEE

I think he liked me a lot, to tell ya' the truth. I think he felt I was somebody he could confide in.

AUSTIN

What'd you do, beat him up or something?

LEE

( *stands fast* )

Hey, I've about had it with the insults buddy! You think yer the only one in the brain department here? Yer the only one that can sit around and cook things up? There's other people got ideas too, ya' know!

AUSTIN

You must've done something. Threatened him or something. Now what'd you do Lee?

LEE

I convinced him!

(*LEE makes sudden menacing lunge toward AUSTIN, wielding golf club above his head, stops himself, frozen moment, long pause, LEE lowers club*)

AUSTIN

Oh, Jesus. You didn't hurt him did you?

( *long silence, LEE, sits back down at table* )

Lee! Did you hurt him?

LEE

I didn't do nothin' to him! He liked my story. Pure and simple. He said it was the best story he's come across in a long, long time.

AUSTIN

That's what he told me about my story! That's the same thing he said to me.

LEE

Well, he musta' been lyin'. He musta' been lyin' to one of us anyway.

AUSTIN

You can't come into this town and start pushing people around. They're gonna' put you away!

LEE

I never pushed anybody around! I beat him fair and square.

( *pause* )

They can't touch me anyway. They can't put a finger on me. I'm gone. I can come in through the window and go out through the door. They never knew what hit 'em. You, yer stuck. Yer the one that's stuck. Not me. So don't be warnin' me what to do in this town.

( *pause, AUSTIN crosses to table, sits at typewriter, rests* )

AUSTIN

Lee, come on, level with me will you? It doesn't make any sense that suddenly he'd throw my idea out the window. I've been talking to him for months. I've got too much at stake. Everything's riding on this project.

LEE

What's yer idea?

AUSTIN

It's just a simple love story.

LEE

What kinda' love story?

AUSTIN

( *stands, crosses into kitchen* )

I'm not telling you!

LEE

Ha! 'Fraid I'll steal it huh? Competition's gettin' kinda' close to home isn't it?

AUSTIN

Where did Saul say he was going?

LEE

He was gonna' take my story to a couple studios.

AUSTIN

That's *my* outline you know! I wrote that outline! You've got no right to be peddling it around.

LEE

You weren't ready to take credit for it last night.

AUSTIN

Give me my keys!

LEE

What?

AUSTIN

The keys! I want my keys back!

LEE

Where you goin'?

AUSTIN

Just give me my keys! I gotta' take a drive. I gotta' get out of here for a while.

LEE

Where you gonna' go, Austin?

AUSTIN

( *pause* )

I might just drive out to the desert for a while. I gotta' think.

LEE

You can think here just as good. This is the perfect setup for thinkin'. We got some writin' to do here, boy. Now let's just have us a little toast. Relax. We're partners now.

(*LEE pops the cork of the champagne bottle, pours two drinks as the lights fade to black*)

## **Act 2, Scene 2**

### **SCENE 6**

*Afternoon. LEE and SAUL in kitchen, AUSTIN in alcove*

LEE

Now you tell him. You tell him, Mr' Kipper.

SAUL KIMMER

Kimmer.

LEE

Kimmer. You tell him what you told me. He don't believe me.

AUSTIN

I don't want to hear it.

SAUL KIMMER

It's really not a big issue, Austin. I was simply amazed by your brother's story and —

AUSTIN

Amazed? You lost a bet! You gambled with my material!

SAUL KIMMER

That's really beside the point, Austin. I'm ready to go all the way with your brother's story. I think it has a great deal of merit.

AUSTIN

I don't want to hear about it, okay? Go tell it to the

executives! Tell it to somebody who's going to turn it into a package deal or something. A T'V' series. Don't tell it to me.

SAUL KIMMER

But I want to continue with your project too, Austin. It's not as though we can't do both. We're big enough for that aren't we?

AUSTIN

"We"? *I* can't do both! I don't know about "we."

LEE

( *to SAUL* )

See, what'd I tell ya'. He's totally unsympathetic.

SAUL KIMMER

Austin, there's no point in our going to another screen writer for this. It just doesn't make sense. You're brothers. You know each other. There's a familiarity with the material that just wouldn't be possible otherwise.

AUSTIN

There's no familiarity with the material! None! I don't know what "Tornado Country" is. I don't know what a "gooseneck" is. And I don't want to know!

( *pointing to LEE* )

He's a hustler! He's a bigger hustler than you are! If you can't see that, then —

LEE

( *to* AUSTIN)

Hey, now hold on. I didn't have to bring this bone back to you, boy. I persuaded Saul here that you were the right man for the job. You don't have to go throwin' up favors in my face.

AUSTIN

Favors! I'm the one who wrote the fuckin' outline! You can't even spell.

SAUL KIMMER

( *to* AUSTIN)

Your brother told me about the situation with your father.

( *pause*)

AUSTIN

What?

( *looks at* LEE)

SAUL KIMMER

That's right. Now we have a clear-cut deal here, Austin. We have big studio money standing behind this thing. Just on the basis of your outline.

AUSTIN

( *to* SAUL)

What'd he tell you about my father?

SAUL KIMMER

Well — that he's destitute. He needs money.

LEE

That's right. He does.

(AUSTIN *shakes his head, stares at them both*)

AUSTIN

( *to* LEE)

And this little assignment is supposed to go toward the old man? A charity project? Is that what this is? Did you cook this up on the ninth green too?

SAUL KIMMER

It's a big slice, Austin.

AUSTIN

( *to LEE* )

I gave him money! I already gave him money. You know that. He drank it all up!

LEE

This is a different deal here.

SAUL KIMMER

We can set up a trust for your father. A large sum of money. It can be doled out to him in parcels so he can't misuse it.

AUSTIN

Yeah, and who's doing the doling?

SAUL KIMMER

Your brother volunteered.

(AUSTIN *laughs*)

LEE

That's right. I'll make sure he uses it for groceries.

AUSTIN

( *to SAUL* )

I'm not doing this script! I'm not writing this crap for you or anybody else. You can't blackmail me into it. You can't threaten me into it. There's no way I'm doing it. So just give it up. Both of you.

( *long pause* )

SAUL KIMMER

Well, that's it then. I mean this is an easy three hundred grand. Just for a first draft. It's incredible, Austin. We've got three different studios all trying to cut each other's throats to get this material. In one morning. That's how hot it is.

AUSTIN

Yeah, well you can afford to give me a percentage on the outline then. And you better get the genius here an agent before he gets burned.

LEE

Saul's gonna' be my agent. Isn't that right, Saul?

SAUL KIMMER

That's right.

( *to* AUSTIN)

Your brother has really got something, Austin. I've been around too long not to recognize it. Raw talent.

AUSTIN

He's got a lotta' balls is what he's got. He's taking you right down the river.

SAUL KIMMER

Three hundred thousand, Austin. Just for a first draft. Now you've never been offered that kind of money before.

AUSTIN

I'm not writing it.

( *pause* )

SAUL KIMMER

I see. Well —

LEE

We'll just go to another writer then. Right, Saul? Just hire us somebody with some enthusiasm. Somebody who can recognize the value of a good story.

SAUL KIMMER

I'm sorry about this, Austin.

AUSTIN

Yeah.

SAUL KIMMER

I mean I was hoping we could continue both things but now I don't see how it's possible.

AUSTIN

So you're dropping my idea altogether. Is that it? Just trade horses in midstream? After all these months of meetings.

SAUL KIMMER



I wish there was another way.

AUSTIN

I've got everything riding on this, Saul. You know that. It's my only shot. If this falls through —

SAUL KIMMER

I have to go with what my instincts tell me —

AUSTIN

Your instincts!

SAUL KIMMER

My gut reaction.

AUSTIN

You lost! That's your gut reaction. You lost a gamble. Now you're trying to tell me you like his story? How could you possibly fall for that story? It's as phony as Hoppalong Cassidy. What do you see in it? I'm curious.

SAUL KIMMER

It has the ring of truth, Austin.

AUSTIN

( *laughs* )

Truth?

LEE

It is true.

SAUL KIMMER

Something about the real West.

AUSTIN

Why? Because it's got horses? Because it's got grown men acting like little boys?

SAUL KIMMER

Something about the land. Your brother is speaking from experience.

AUSTIN

So am I!

SAUL KIMMER

But nobody's interested in love these days, Austin. Let's face it.

LEE

That's right.

AUSTIN

( *to SAUL* )

He's been camped out on the desert for three months. Talking to cactus. What's he know about what people wanna' see on the screen! I drive on the freeway every day. I swallow the smog. I watch the news in color. I shop in the Safeway. I'm the one who's in touch! Not him!

SAUL KIMMER

I have to go now, Austin.

(*SAUL starts to leave*)

AUSTIN

There's no such thing as the West anymore! It's a dead issue! It's dried up, Saul, and so are you.

(*SAUL stops and turns to AUSTIN*)

SAUL KIMMER

Maybe you're right. But I have to take the gamble, don't I?

AUSTIN

You're a fool to do this, Saul.

SAUL KIMMER

I've always gone on my hunches. Always. And I've never been wrong.

( *to LEE* )

I'll talk to you tomorrow; Lee.

LEE

All right, Mr' Kimmer.

SAUL KIMMER

Maybe we could have some lunch.

LEE

Fine with me.

( *smiles at AUSTIN* )

SAUL KIMMER

I'll give you a ring.

(SAUL *exits, lights to black as brothers look at each other from a distance*)

### Act 2, Scene 3

#### SCENE 7

*Night. Coyotes, crickets, sound of typewriter in dark, candlelight up on LEE at typewriter struggling to type with one finger system, AUSTIN sits sprawled out on kitchen floor with whiskey bottle, drunk.*

AUSTIN

( *singing, from floor* )

"Red sails in the sunset  
Way out on the blue  
Please carry my loved one  
Home safely to me  
Red sails in the sunset —"

LEE

( *slams fist on table* )

Hey! Knock it off will ya! I'm tryin' to concentrate here.

AUSTIN

( *laughs* )

You're tryin' to concentrate?

LEE

Yeah. That's right.

AUSTIN

Now you're tryin' to concentrate.

LEE

Between you, the coyotes and the crickets a thought don't have much of a chance.

AUSTIN

"Between me, the coyotes and the crickets." What a great title.

LEE

I don't need a title! I need a thought.

AUSTIN

( *laughs* )

A thought! Here's a thought for ya' —

LEE

I'm not askin' fer yer thoughts! I got my own. I can do this thing on my own.

AUSTIN

You're going to write an entire script on your own?

LEE

That's right.

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

Here's a thought. Saul Kimmer —

LEE

Shut up will ya'!

AUSTIN

He thinks we're the same person.

LEE

Don't get cute.

AUSTIN

He does! He's lost his mind. Poor old Saul.

( *giggles* )

Thinks we're one and the same.

LEE

Why don't you ease up on that champagne.

AUSTIN

( *holding up bottle* )

This isn't champagne anymore. We went through the champagne a long time ago. This is serious stuff. The days of champagne are long gone.

LEE

Well, go outside and drink it.

AUSTIN

I'm enjoying your company, Lee. For the first time since your arrival I am finally enjoying your company. And now you want me to go outside and drink alone?

LEE

That's right.

*(LEE reads through paper in typewriter, makes an erasure)*

AUSTIN

You think you'll make more progress if you're alone? You might drive yourself crazy.

LEE

I could have this thing done in a night if I had a little silence.

AUSTIN

Well you'd still have the crickets to contend with. The coyotes. The sounds of the Police Helicopters prowling above the neighborhood. Slashing their searchlights down through the streets. Hunting for the likes of you.

LEE

I'm a screenwriter now! I'm legitimate.

AUSTIN

*( laughing)*

A screenwriter!

LEE

That's right. I'm on salary. That's more'n I can say for you. I got an advance coming.

AUSTIN

This is true. This is very true. An advance.

*( pause)*

Well, maybe I oughta' go out and try my hand at your trade. Since you're doing so good at mine.

LEE

Ha!

*(LEE attempts to type some more but gets the ribbon tangled up, starts trying to re-thread it as they continue talking)*

AUSTIN

Well why not? You don't think I've got what it takes to sneak into people's houses and steal their T·V's?

LEE

You couldn't steal a toaster without losin' yer lunch.

*(AUSTIN stands with a struggle, supports himself by the sink)*

AUSTIN

You don't think I could sneak into somebody's house and steal a toaster?

LEE

Go take a shower or somethin' will ya!

*(LEE gets more tangled up with the typewriter ribbon, pulling it out of the machine as though it was fishing line)*

AUSTIN

You really don't think I could steal a crumby toaster? How much you wanna' bet I can't steal a toaster! How much? Go ahead! You're a gambler aren't you? Tell me how much yer willing to put on the line. Some part of your big advance? Oh, you haven't got that yet have you. I forgot.

LEE

All right. I'll bet you your car that you can't steal a toaster without gettin' busted.

AUSTIN

You already got my car!

LEE

Okay, your house then.

AUSTIN

What're you gonna' give me! I'm not talkin' about my house and my car, I'm talkin' about what are you gonna' give me. You don't have nothin' to give me.

LEE

I'll give you — shared screen credit. How 'bout that? I'll have it put in the contract that this was written by the both of us.

AUSTIN

I don't want my name on that piece of shit! I want something of value. You got anything of value? You got any tidbits from the desert? Any Rattlesnake bones? I'm not a greedy man. Any little personal treasure will suffice.

LEE

I'm gonna' just kick yer ass out in a minute.

AUSTIN

Oh, so now you're gonna' kick me out! Now I'm the intruder. I'm the one who's invading your precious privacy.

LEE

I'm trying to do some screenwriting here!!

*(LEE stands, picks up typewriter, slams it down hard on table, pause, silence except for crickets)*

AUSTIN

Well, you got everything you need. You got plenty a' coffee? Groceries. You got a car. A contract.

*(pause)*

Might need a new typewriter ribbon but other than that you're pretty well fixed. I'll just leave ya' alone for a while.

*(AUSTIN tries to steady himself to leave, LEE makes a move toward him)*

LEE

Where you goin'?

AUSTIN

Don't worry about me. I'm not the one to worry about.

*(AUSTIN weaves toward exit, stops)*

LEE

What're you gonna' do? Just go wander out into the night?

AUSTIN

I'm gonna' make a little tour.

LEE

Why don't ya' just go to bed for Christ's sake. Yer makin' me sick.

AUSTIN

I can take care a' myself. Don't worry about me.

(AUSTIN *weaves badly in another attempt to exit, he crashes to the floor; LEE goes to him but remains standing*)

LEE

You want me to call your wife for ya' or something?

AUSTIN

(*from floor*)

My wife?

LEE

Yeah. I mean maybe she can help ya' out. Talk to ya' or somethin'.

AUSTIN

(*struggles to stand again*)

She's five hundred miles away. North. North of here. Up in the North country where things are calm. I don't need any help. I'm gonna' go outside and I'm gonna' steal a toaster. I'm gonna' steal some other stuff too. I might even commit bigger crimes. Bigger than you ever dreamed of. Crimes beyond the imagination!

(AUSTIN *manages to get himself vertical, tries to head for exit again*)

LEE

Just hang on a minute, Austin.

AUSTIN

Why? What for? You don't need my help, right? You got a handle on the project. Besides, I'm lookin' forward to the smell of the night. The bushes. Orange blossoms. Dust in the driveways. Rain bird sprinklers. Lights in people's houses. You're right about the lights, Lee. Everybody else is livin' the life. Indoors. Safe. This is a Paradise down here. You know that? We're livin' in a Paradise. We've forgotten about that.

LEE

You sound just like the old man now.



AUSTIN

Yeah, well we all sound alike when we're sloshed. We just sorta' echo each other.

LEE

Maybe if we could work on this together we could bring him back out here. Get him settled down some place.

*(AUSTIN turns violently toward LEE, takes a swing at him, misses and crashes to the floor again, LEE stays standing)*

AUSTIN

I don't want him out here! I've had it with him! I went all the way out there! I went out of my way. I gave him money and all he did was play Al Jolson records and spit at me! I gave him money!

*(pause)*

LEE

Just help me a little with the characters, all right? You know how to do it, Austin.

AUSTIN

*(on floor, laughs)*

The characters!

LEE

Yeah. You know. The way they talk and stuff. I can hear it in my head but I can't get it down on paper.

AUSTIN

What characters?

LEE

The guys. The guys in the story.

AUSTIN

Those aren't characters.

LEE

Whatever you call 'em then. I need to write somethin' out.

AUSTIN

Those are illusions of characters.

LEE

I don't give a damn what ya' call 'em! You know what I'm talkin' about!

AUSTIN

Those are fantasies of a long lost boyhood.

LEE

I gotta' write somethin' out on paper!!

( *pause* )

AUSTIN

What for? Saul's gonna' get you a fancy screenwriter isn't he?

LEE

I wanna' do it myself!

AUSTIN

Then do it! Yer on your own now, old buddy. You bulldogged yer way into contention. Now you gotta' carry it through.

LEE

I will but I need some advice. Just a couple a' things. Come on, Austin. Just help me get 'em talkin' right. It won't take much.

AUSTIN

Oh, now you're having a little doubt huh? What happened? The pressure's on, boy. This is it. You gotta' come up with it now. You don't come up with a winner on your first time out they just cut your head off. They don't give you a second chance ya' know.

LEE

I got a good story! I know it's a good story. I just need a little help is all.

AUSTIN

Not from me. Not from yer little old brother. I'm retired.

LEE

You could save this thing for me, Austin. I'd give ya' half the money. I would. I only need half anyway. With this kinda' money I could be a long time down the road. I'd never bother ya' again. I promise. You'd never even see me again.

AUSTIN

( *still on floor* )

You'd disappear?

LEE

I would for sure.

AUSTIN

Where would you disappear to?

LEE

That don't matter. I got plenty a' places.

AUSTIN

Nobody can disappear. The old man tried that. Look where it got him. He lost his teeth.

LEE

He never had any money.

AUSTIN

I don't mean that. I mean his teeth! His real teeth. First he lost his real teeth, then he lost his false teeth. You never knew that did ya'? He never confided in you.

LEE

Nah, I never knew that.

AUSTIN

You wanna' drink?

*(AUSTIN offers bottle to LEE, LEE takes it, sits down on kitchen floor with AUSTIN, they share the bottle)*

Yeah, he lost his real teeth one at a time. Woke up every morning with another tooth lying on the mattress. Finally, he decides he's gotta' get 'em all pulled out but he doesn't have any money. Middle of Arizona with no money and no insurance and every morning another tooth is lying on the mattress.

*( takes a drink)*

So what does he do?

LEE

I dunno'. I never knew about that.

AUSTIN

He begs the government. G' I' Bill or some damn thing. Some pension plan he remembers in the back of his head. And they send him out the money.

LEE

They did?

*( they keep trading the bottle between them, taking drinks)*

AUSTIN

Yeah. They send him the money but it's not enough money. Costs a lot to have all yer teeth yanked. They charge by the individual tooth, ya' know. I mean one tooth isn't equal to another tooth. Some are more expensive. Like the big ones in the back —

LEE

So what happened?

AUSTIN

So he locates a Mexican dentist in Juarez who'll do the whole thing for a song. And he takes off hitchhiking to the border.

LEE

Hitchhiking?

AUSTIN

Yeah. So how long you think it takes him to get to the border? A man his age.

LEE

I dunno.

AUSTIN

Eight days it takes him. Eight days in the rain and the sun and every day he's droppin' teeth on the blacktop and nobody'll pick him up 'cause his mouth's full a' blood.

*( pause, they drink)*

So finally he stumbles into the dentist. Dentist takes all his money and all his teeth. And there he is, in Mexico, with his gums sewed up and his pockets empty.

*( long silence, AUSTIN drinks)*

LEE

That's it?

AUSTIN

Then I go out to see him, see. I go out there and I take him out for a nice Chinese dinner. But he doesn't eat. All he wants to do is drink Martinis outa' plastic cups. And he takes his teeth out and lays 'em on the table 'cause he can't stand the feel of 'em. And we ask the waitress for one a' those doggie bags to take the Chop Suey home in. So he drops his teeth in the doggie bag along with the Chop Suey. And then we go out to hit all the bars up and down the highway. Says he wants to introduce me to all his buddies. And in one a' those bars, in one a' those bars up and down the highway, he left that doggie bag with his teeth laying in the Chop Suey.

LEE

You never found it?

AUSTIN

We went back but we never did find it.

( *pause* )

Now that's a true story. True to life.

( *they drink as lights fade to black* )

## **Act 2, Scene 4**

### **SCENE 8**

*Very early morning, between night and day. No crickets, coyotes yapping feverishly in distance before light comes up, a small fire blazes up in the dark from alcove area, sound of LEE smashing typewriter with a golf club, lights coming up, LEE seen smashing typewriter methodically then dropping pages of his script into a burning bowl set on the floor o alcove, flames leap up, AUSTIN has a whole bunch of stolen toasters lined up on the sink counter along with LEE'S stolen T`V`, the toasters are of a wide variety of models, mostly chrome, AUSTIN goes up and down the line of toasters, breathing on them and polishing them with a*

*dish towel, both men are drunk, empty whiskey bottles and beer cans litter floor of kitchen, they share a half empty bottle on one of the chairs in the alcove, LEE keeps periodically taking deliberate ax-chops at the typewriter using a nine-iron as AUSTIN speaks, all of their mother's house plants are dead and drooping.*

AUSTIN

( *polishing toasters* )

There's gonna' be a general lack of toast in the neighborhood this morning. Many, many unhappy, bewildered breakfast faces. I guess it's best not to even think of the victims. Not to even entertain it. Is that the right psychology?

LEE

( *pauses* )

What?

AUSTIN

Is that the correct criminal psychology? Not to think of the victims?

LEE

What victims?

*(LEE takes another swipe at typewriter with nine-iron, adds pages to the fire)*

AUSTIN

The victims of crime. Of breaking and entering. I mean is it a prerequisite for a criminal not to have a conscience?

LEE

Ask a criminal.

*(pause, LEE stares at AUSTIN)*

What're you gonna' do with all those toasters? That's the dumbest thing I ever saw in my life.

AUSTIN

I've got hundreds of dollars worth of household appliances here. You may not realize that.

LEE

Yeah, and how many hundreds of dollars did you walk right past?

AUSTIN

It was toasters you challenged me to. Only toasters. I ignored every other temptation.

LEE

I never challenged you! That's no challenge. Anybody can steal a toaster.

*(LEE smashes typewriter again)*

AUSTIN

You don't have to take it out on my typewriter ya' know. It's not the machine's fault that you can't write. It's a sin to do that to a good machine.

LEE

A sin?

AUSTIN

When you consider all the writers who never even had a machine. Who would have given an eyeball for a good typewriter. Any typewriter.

(LEE *smashes typewriter again*)

AUSTIN

(*polishing toasters*)

All the ones who wrote on matchbook covers. Paper bags. Toilet paper. Who had their writing destroyed by their jailers. Who persisted beyond all odds. Those writers would find it hard to understand your actions.

(LEE *comes down on typewriter with one final crushing blow of the nine-iron then collapses in one of the chairs, takes a drink from bottle, pause*)

AUSTIN

(*after pause*)

Not to mention demolishing a perfectly good golf club. What about all the struggling golfers? What about Lee Trevino? What do you think he would've said when he was batting balls around with broomsticks at the age of nine. Impoverished.

(*pause*)

LEE

What time is it anyway?

AUSTIN

No idea. Time stands still when you're havin' fun.

LEE

Is it too late to call a woman? You know any women?

AUSTIN

I'm a married man.

LEE

I mean a local woman.

(AUSTIN *looks out at light through window above sink*)

AUSTIN

It's either too late or too early. You're the nature enthusiast. Can't you tell the time by the light in the sky? Orient yourself around the North Star or something?

LEE

I can't tell anything.

AUSTIN

Maybe you need a little breakfast. Some toast! How 'bout some toast?

*(AUSTIN goes to cupboard, pulls out loaf of bread and starts dropping slices into every toaster, LEE stays sitting, drinks, watches AUSTIN)*

LEE

I don't need toast. I need a woman.

AUSTIN

A woman isn't the answer. Never was.

LEE

I'm not talkin' about permanent. I'm talkin' about temporary.

AUSTIN

*( putting toast in toasters)*

We'll just test the merits of these little demons. See which brands have a tendency to burn. See which one can produce a perfectly golden piece of fluffy toast.

LEE

How much, gas you got in yet car?

AUSTIN

I haven't driven my car for days now. So I haven't had an opportunity to look at the gas gauge.

LEE

Take a guess. You think there's enough to get me to Bakersfield?

AUSTIN

Bakersfield? What's in Bakersfield?

LEE

Just never mind what's in Bakersfield! You think there's enough goddamn gas in the car!



AUSTIN

Sure.

LEE

Sure. You could care less, right. Let me run outa' gas on the Grapevine. You could give a shit.

AUSTIN

I'd say there was enough gas to get you just about anywhere, Lee. With your determination and guts.

LEE

What the hell time is it anyway?

*(LEE pulls out his wallet, starts going through dozens of small pieces of paper with phone numbers written on them, drops some on the floor, drops others in the fire)*

AUSTIN

Very early. This is the time of morning when the coyotes kill people's cocker spaniels. Did you hear them? That's what they were doing out there. Luring innocent pets away from their homes.

LEE

*( searching through his papers)*

What's the area code for Bakersfield? You know?

AUSTIN

You could always call the operator.

LEE

I can't stand that voice they give ya'.

AUSTIN

What voice?

LEE

That voice that warns you that if you'd only tried harder to find the number in the phone book you wouldn't have to be calling the operator to begin with.

*(LEE gets up, holding a slip of paper from his wallet, stumbles toward phone on wall, yanks receiver, starts dialing)*

AUSTIN

Well I don't understand why you'd want to talk to anybody else anyway. I mean you can talk to me. I'm your brother.

LEE

( *dialing* )

I wanna' talk to a woman. I haven't heard a woman's voice in a long time.

AUSTIN

Not since the Botanist?

LEE

What?

AUSTIN

Nothing.

( *starts singing as he tends toast* )

"Red sails in the sunset  
Way out on the blue  
Please carry my loved one  
Home safely to me"

LEE

Hey, knock it off will ya'! This is long distance here.

AUSTIN

Bakersfield?

LEE

Yeah, Bakersfield. It's Kern County.

AUSTIN

Well, what County are *we* in?

LEE

You better get yourself a 7-Up, boy.

AUSTIN

One County's as good as another.

(AUSTIN *hums "Red Sails" softly as LEE talks on phone*)

LEE

( *to phone* )

Yeah, operator look — first off I wanna' know the area code for Bakersfield. Right. Bakersfield! Okay. Good. Now I wanna' know if you can help me track somebody down.

( *pause* )

No, no I mean a phone number. Just a phone number. Okay.

( *holds a piece of paper up and reads it* )

Okay, the name is Melly Ferguson. Melly.

( *pause* )

I dunno'. Melly. Maybe. Yeah. Maybe Melanie. Yeah. Melanie Ferguson. Okay.

( *pause* )

What? I can't hear ya' so good. Sounds like yer under the ocean.

( *pause* )

You got ten Melanie Fergusons? How could that be? Ten Melanie Fergusons in Bakersfield? Well gimme all of 'em then.

( *pause* )

What d'ya' mean? Gimmie all ten Melanie Fergusons! That's right. Just a second.

( *to AUSTIN* )

Gimme a pen.

AUSTIN

I don't have a pen.

LEE

Gimme a pencil then!

AUSTIN

I don't have a pencil.

LEE

( *to phone* )

Just a second, operator.

( to AUSTIN)

Yer a writer and ya' don't have a pen or a pencil!

AUSTIN

I'm not a writer. You're a writer.

LEE

I'm on the phone here! Get me a pen or a pencil.

AUSTIN

I gotta' watch the toast.

LEE

( to phone)

Hang on a second, operator.

*(LEE lets the phone drop then starts pulling all the drawers in the kitchen out on the floor and dumping the contents, searching for a pencil, AUSTIN watches him casually)*

LEE

*( crashing through drawers, throwing contents around kitchen)*

This is the last time I try to live with people, boy! I can't believe it. Here I am! Here I am again in a desperate situation! This would never happen out on the desert. I would never be in this kinda' situation out on the desert. Isn't there a pen or a pencil in this house! Who lives in this house anyway!

AUSTIN

Our mother.

LEE

How come she don't have a pen or a pencil! She's a social person isn't she? Doesn't she have to make shopping lists? She's gotta' have a pencil.

*( finds a pencil)*

Aaha!

*( he rushes back to phone, picks up receiver)*

All right operator. Operator? Hey! Operator! Goddamnit!

*(LEE rips the phone off the wall and throws it down, goes back to chair and falls into it, drinks, long pause)*

AUSTIN

She hung up?

LEE

Yeah, she hung up. I knew she was gonna' hang up. I could hear it in her voice.

*(LEE starts going through his slips of paper again)*

AUSTIN

Well, you're probably better off staying here with me anyway. I'll take care of you.

LEE

I don't need takin' care of! Not by you anyway.

AUSTIN

Toast is almost ready.

*(AUSTIN starts buttering all the toast as it pops up)*

LEE

I don't want any toast!

*( long pause)*

AUSTIN

You gotta' eat something. Can't just drink. How long have we been drinking, anyway?

LEE

*( looking through slips of paper)*

Maybe it was Fresno. What's the area code for Fresno? How could I have lost that number! She was beautiful.

*( pause)*

AUSTIN

Why don't you just forget about that, Lee. Forget about the woman.

LEE

She had green eyes. You know what green eyes do to me?

AUSTIN

I know but you're not gonna' get it on with her now anyway. It's dawn already. She's in Bakersfield for Christ's sake.

( *long pause, LEE considers the situation*)

LEE

Yeah.

( *looks at windows*)

It's dawn?

AUSTIN

Let's just have some toast and —

LEE

What is this bullshit with the toast anyway! You make it sound like salvation or something. I don't want any goddamn toast! How many times I gotta' tell ya'!

(*LEE gets up, crosses upstage to windows in alcove, looks out, AUSTIN butters toast*)

AUSTIN

Well it is like salvation sort of. I mean the smell. I love the smell of toast. And the sun's coming up. It makes me feel like anything's possible. Ya' know?

LEE

( *back to AUSTIN, facing windows upstage*)

So go to church why don't ya'.

AUSTIN

Like a beginning. I love beginnings.

LEE

Oh yeah. I've always been kinda' partial to endings myself.

AUSTIN

What if I come with you, Lee?

LEE

( *pause as LEE turns toward AUSTIN*)

What?

AUSTIN

What if I come with you out to the desert?

LEE

Are you kiddin'?

AUSTIN

No. I'd just like to see what it's like.

LEE

You wouldn't last a day out there pal.

AUSTIN

That's what you said about the toasters. You said I couldn't steal a toaster either.

LEE

A toaster's got nothin' to do with the desert.

AUSTIN

I could make it, Lee. I'm not that helpless. I can cook.

LEE

Cook?

AUSTIN

I can.

LEE

So what! You can cook. Toast.

AUSTIN

I can make fires. I know how to get fresh water from condensation.

(AUSTIN *stacks buttered toast up in a tall stack on plate*)

(LEE *slams table*)

LEE

It's not somethin' you learn out of a Boy Scout handbook!

AUSTIN

Well how do you learn it then! How're you supposed to learn it!

( *pause* )

LEE

Ya' just learn it, that's all. Ya' learn it 'cause ya' have to learn it. You don't *have* to learn it.

AUSTIN

You could teach me.

LEE

( *stands* )

What're you, crazy or somethin'? You went to

college. Here, you are down here, rollin' in bucks. Floatin' up and down in elevators. And you wanna' learn how to live on the desert!

AUSTIN

I do, Lee. I really do. There's nothin' down here for me. There never was. When we were kids here it was different. There was a life here then. But now — I keep comin' down here thinkin' it's the fifties or somethin'. I keep finding myself getting off the freeway at familiar landmarks that turn out to be unfamiliar. On the way to appointments. Wandering down streets I thought I recognized that turn out to be replicas of streets I remember. Streets I misremember. Streets I can't tell if I lived on or saw in a postcard. Fields that don't even exist anymore.

LEE

There's no point cryin' about that now.

AUSTIN

There's nothin' real down here, Lee! Least of all me!

LEE

Well I can't save you from that!

AUSTIN

You can let me come with you.

LEE

No dice, pal.

AUSTIN



You could let me come with you, Lee!

LEE

Hey, do you actually think I chose to live out in the middle a' nowhere? Do ya'? Ya' think it's some kinda' philosophical decision I took or somethin'? I'm livin' out there 'cause I can't make it here! And yer bitchin' to me about all yer success!

AUSTIN

I'd cash it all in in a second. That's the truth.

LEE

*(pause, shakes his head)*

I can't believe this.

AUSTIN

Let me go with you.

LEE

Stop sayin' that will ya'! Yer worse than a dog.

*(AUSTIN offers out the plate of neatly stacked toast to LEE)*

AUSTIN

You want some toast?

*(LEE suddenly explodes and knocks the plate out of AUSTIN'S hand, toast goes flying, long frozen moment where it appears LEE might go all the way this time when AUSTIN breaks it by slowly lowering himself to his knees and begins gathering the scattered toast from the floor and stacking it back on the plate, LEE begins to circle AUSTIN in a slow, predatory way, crushing pieces of toast in his wake, no words for a while, AUSTIN keeps gathering toast, even the crushed pieces)*

LEE

Tell ya' what I'll do, little brother. I might just consider

makin' you a deal. Little trade.

*(AUSTIN continues gathering toast as LEE circles him through this)*

You write me up this screenplay thing just like I tell ya'. I mean you can use all yer usual tricks and stuff. Yer fancy language. Yer artistic hocus pocus. But ya' gotta' write everything like I say. Every move. Every time they run outa' gas, they run outa' gas. Every time they wanna' jump on a horse, they do just that. If they wanna' stay in Texas, by God they'll stay in Texas!

*( Keeps circling)*

And you finish the whole thing up for me. Top to bottom. And you put my name on it. And I own all the rights. And every dime goes in my pocket. You do that and I'll sure enough take ya' with me to the desert.

(LEE stops, pause, looks down at AUSTIN)

How's that sound?

( pause as AUSTIN stands slowly holding plate of demolished toast, their faces are very close, pause)

AUSTIN

It's a deal.

(LEE stares straight into AUSTIN'S eyes, then he slowly takes a piece of toast off the plate, raises it to his mouth and takes a huge crushing bite never taking his eyes off AUSTIN'S, as LEE crunches into the toast the lights black out)

## Act 2, Scene 5

### SCENE 9

*Mid-day. No sound, blazing heat, the stage is ravaged; bottles, toasters, smashed typewriter, ripped out telephone, etc. All the debris from previous scene is now starkly visible in intense yellow light, the effect should be like a desert junkyard at high noon, the coolness of the preceding scenes is totally obliterated. AUSTIN is seated at table in alcove, shirt open, pouring with sweat, hunched over a writing notebook, scribbling notes desperately with a ballpoint pen. LEE with no shirt, beer in hand, sweat pouring down his chest, is walking a slow circle around the table, picking his way through the objects, sometimes kicking them aside.*

LEE

( as he walks)

All right, read it back to me. Read it back to me!

AUSTIN

( scribbling at top speed)

Just a second.

LEE

Come on, come on! Just read what ya' got.

AUSTIN

I can't keep up! It's not the same as if I had a typewriter.

LEE

Just read what we got so far. Forget about the rest.

AUSTIN

All right. Let's see — okay —

( *wipes sweat from his face, reads as LEE circles* )

Luke says uh —

LEE

Luke?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

LEE

His name's Luke? All right, all right — we can change the names later. What's he say? Come on, come on.

AUSTIN

He says uh —

( *reading* )

"I told ya' you were a fool to follow me in here. I know this prairie like the back a' my hand."

LEE

No, no, no! That's not what I said. I never said that.

AUSTIN

That's what I wrote.

LEE

It's not what I said. I never said "like the back a' my hand." That's stupid. That's one a' those — whadya' call it? Whadya' call that?

AUSTIN

What?

LEE

Whadya' call it when somethin's been said a thousand times before. Whadya' call that?

AUSTIN

Um — a cliché?

LEE

Yeah. That's right. Cliché. That's what that is. A cliché. "The back a' my hand." That's stupid.

AUSTIN

That's what you said.

LEE

I never said that! And even if I did, that's where yer supposed to come in. That's where yer supposed to change it to somethin' better.

AUSTIN

Well how am I supposed to do that and write down what you say at the same time?

LEE

Ya' just do, that's all! You hear a stupid line you change it. That's yer job.

AUSTIN

All right.

( *makes more notes* )

LEE

What're you changin' it to?

AUSTIN

I'm not changing it. I'm just trying to catch up.

LEE

Well change it! We gotta' change that, we can't leave that in there like that. "... the back a' my hand." That's dumb.

AUSTIN

( *stops writing, sits back* )

All right.

LEE

( *pacing* )

So what'll we change it to?

AUSTIN

Um — How 'bout — "I'm on intimate terms with this prairie."

LEE

( *to himself considering line as he walks* )

"I'm on intimate

terms with this prairie." Intimate terms, intimate terms. Intimate — that means like uh — sexual right?

AUSTIN

Well — yeah — or —

LEE

He's on sexual terms with the prairie? How dya' figure that?

AUSTIN

Well it doesn't necessarily have to mean sexual.

LEE

What's it mean then?

AUSTIN

It means uh — close — personal —

LEE

All right. How's it sound? Put it into the uh — the line there. Read it back. Let's see how it sounds.

( *to himself* )

"Intimate terms."

AUSTIN

( *scribbles in notebook* )

Okay. It'd go something like this:

( *reads* )

"I told ya' you were a fool to follow me in here. I'm on intimate terms with this prairie."

LEE

That's good. I like that. That's real good.

AUSTIN

You do?

LEE

Yeah. Don't you?

AUSTIN

Sure.

LEE

Sounds original now. "Intimate terms." That's good. Okay. Now we're cookin! That has a real ring to it.

*(AUSTIN makes more notes, LEE walks around, pours beer on his arms and rubs it over his chest feeling good about the new progress, as he does this MOM enters unobtrusively down left with her luggage, she stops and stares at the scene still holding luggage as the two men continue, unaware of her presence, AUSTIN absorbed in his writing, LEE cooling himself off with beer)*

LEE

*( continues)*

"He's on intimate terms with this prairie." Sounds real mysterious and kinda' threatening at the same time.

AUSTIN

*( writing rapidly)*

Good.

LEE

Now —

*(LEE turns and suddenly sees MOM, he stares at her for a while, she stares back, AUSTIN keeps writing feverishly, not noticing, LEE walks slowly over to MOM and takes a closer look, long pause)*

LEE

Mom?

*(AUSTIN looks up suddenly from his writing, sees MOM, stands quickly, long pause, MOM surveys the damage)*

AUSTIN

Mom. What're you doing back?

MOM

I'm back.

LEE

Here, lemme take those for ya.

*(LEE sets beer on counter than takes both her bags but doesn't know where to set them down in the sea of junk so he just keeps holding them)*

AUSTIN

I wasn't expecting you back so soon. I thought uh — How was Alaska?

MOM

Fine.

LEE

See any igloos?

MOM

No. Just glaciers.

AUSTIN

Cold huh?

MOM

What?

AUSTIN

It must've been cold up there?

MOM

Not really.

LEE

Musta' been colder than this here. I mean we're havin' a real scorcher here.

MOM

Oh?

*( she looks at damage)*

LEE

Yeah. Must be in the hundreds.

AUSTIN

You wanna' take your coat off, Mom?

MOM

No.

( *pause, she surveys space* )

What happened in here?

AUSTIN

Oh um — Me and Lee were just sort of celebrating and uh —

MOM

Celebrating?

AUSTIN

Yeah. Uh — Lee sold a screenplay. A story, I mean.

MOM

Lee did?

AUSTIN

Yeah.

MOM

Not you?

AUSTIN

No. Him.

MOM

( *to LEE* )

You sold a screenplay?

LEE

Yeah. That's right. We're just sorta' finishing it up right now. That's what we're doing here.

AUSTIN

Me and Lee are going out to the desert to live.

MOM

You and Lee?

AUSTIN

Yeah. I'm taking off with Lee.



MOM

*( she looks back and forth at each of them, pause)*

You gonna go live with your father?

AUSTIN

No. We're going to a different desert Mom.

MOM

I see. Well, you'll probably wind up on the same desert sooner or later. What're all these toasters doing here?

AUSTIN

Well — we had kind of a contest.

MOM

Contest?

LEE

Yeah.

AUSTIN

Lee won.

MOM

Did you win a lot of money, Lee?

LEE

Well not yet. It's comin' in any day now.

MOM

*( to LEE)*

What happened to your shirt?

LEE

Oh. I was sweatin' like a pig and I took it off.

*(AUSTIN grabs LEE'S shirt off the table and tosses it to him, LEE sets down suitcases and puts his shirt on)*

MOM

Well it's one hell of a mess in here isn't it?

AUSTIN

Yeah, I'll clean it up for you, Mom. I just didn't know you were coming back so soon.

MOM

I didn't either.

AUSTIN

What happened?

MOM

Nothing. I just started missing all my plants.

*( she notices dead plants)*

AUSTIN

Oh.

MOM

Oh, they're all dead aren't they.

*( she crosses toward them, examines them closely)*

You didn't get a chance to water I guess.

AUSTIN

I was doing it and then Lee came and —

LEE

Yeah I just distracted him a whole lot here, Mom. It's not his fault.

*( pause, as MOM stares at plants)*

MOM

Oh well, one less thing to take care of I guess.

*( turns toward brothers)*

Oh, that reminds me — You boys will probably never guess who's in town. Try and guess.

*( long pause, brothers stare at her)*

AUSTIN

Whadya' mean, Mom?

MOM

Take a guess. Somebody very important has come to town. I read it, coming down on the Greyhound.

LEE

Somebody very important?

MOM

See if you can guess. You'll never guess.

AUSTIN

Mom — we're trying to uh —

*( points to writing pad )*

MOM

Picasso.

*( pause )*

Picasso's in town. Isn't that incredible? Right now.

*( pause )*

AUSTIN

Picasso's dead, Mom.

MOM

No, he's not dead. He's visiting the museum. I read it on the bus. We have to go down there and see him.

AUSTIN

Mom —

MOM

This is the chance of a lifetime. Can you imagine? We could all go down and meet him. All three of us.

LEE

Uh — I don't think I'm really up fer meetin' anybody right now. I'm uh — What's his name?

MOM

Picasso! Picasso! You've never heard of Picasso? Austin, you've heard of Picasso.

AUSTIN

Mom, we're not going to have time.

MOM

It won't take long. We'll just hop in the car and go down there. An opportunity like this doesn't come along every day.

AUSTIN

We're gonna' be leavin' here, Mom!

( *pause* )

MOM

Oh.

LEE

Yeah.

( *pause* )

MOM

You're both leaving?

LEE

( *looks at AUSTIN* )

Well we were thinkin' about that before but now I —

AUSTIN

No, we are! We're both leaving. We've got it all planned.

MOM

( *to AUSTIN* )

Well you can't leave. You have a family.

AUSTIN

I'm leaving. I'm getting out of here.

LEE

( *to MOM* )

I don't really think Austin's cut out for the desert do you?

MOM

No. He's not.

AUSTIN

I'm going with you, Lee!

MOM

He's too thin.

LEE

Yeah, he'd just burn up out there.

AUSTIN

( to LEE)

We just gotta' finish this screenplay and then we're gonna' take off. That's the plan. That's what you said. Come on, let's get back to work, Lee.

LEE

I can't work under these conditions here. It's too hot.

AUSTIN

Then we'll do it on the desert.

LEE

Don't be tellin' me what we're gonna do!

MOM

Don't shout in the house.

LEE

We're just gonna' have to postpone the whole deal.

AUSTIN

I can't postpone it! It's gone past postponing! I'm doing everything you said. I'm writing down exactly what you tell me.

LEE

Yeah, but you were right all along see. It is a dumb story. "Two lamebrains chasin' each other across Texas." That's what you said, right?

AUSTIN

I never said that.

(LEE *sneers in AUSTIN'S face then turns to MOM*)

LEE

I'm gonna' just borrow some a' your antiques, Mom. You don't mind do ya'? Just a few plates and things. Silverware.

(LEE *starts going through all the cupboards in kitchen pulling out plates and stacking them on counter as MOM and AUSTIN watch*)

MOM

You don't have any utensils on the desert?

LEE

Nah, I'm fresh out.

AUSTIN

( *to LEE*)

What're you doing?

MOM

Well some of those are very old. Bone China.

LEE

I'm tired of eatin' outa' my bare hands, ya' know. It's not civilized.

AUSTIN

( *to LEE*)

What're you doing? We made a deal!

MOM

Couldn't you borrow the plastic ones instead? I have plenty of plastic ones.

LEE

( *as he stacks plates*)

It's not the same. Plastic's not the same at all. What I need is somethin' authentic. Somethin' to keep me in touch. It's easy to get outa' touch out there. Don't worry I'll get em' back to ya'.

(AUSTIN *rushes up to LEE, grabs him by shoulders*)

AUSTIN

You can't just drop the whole thing, Lee!

(LEE *turns, pushes AUSTIN in the chest knocking him backwards into the alcove, MOM watches numbly, LEE returns to collecting the plates, silverware, etc.*)

MOM

You boys shouldn't fight in the house. Go outside and fight.

LEE

I'm not fightin'. I'm leavin'.

MOM

There's been enough damage done already.

LEE

( *his back to AUSTIN and MOM, stacking dishes on counter*)

I'm clearin' outa' here once and for all. All this town does is drive a man insane. Look what it's done to Austin there. I'm not lettin' that happen to me. Sell myself down the river. No sir. I'd rather be a hundred miles from nowhere than let that happen to me.

( *during this AUSTIN has picked up the ripped-out phone from the floor and wrapped the cord tightly around both his hands, he lunges at LEE whose back is still to him, wraps the cord around LEE'S neck, plants a foot in LEE'S back and pulls back on the cord, tightening it, LEE chokes desperately, can't speak and can't reach AUSTIN with his arms, AUSTIN keeps applying pressure on LEE's back with his foot, bending him into the sink, MOM watches*)

AUSTIN

( *tightening cord*)

You're not goin' anywhere! You're not takin' anything with you. You're not takin' my car! You're not takin' the dishes! You're not takin' anything! You're stayin' right here!

MOM

You'll have to stop fighting in the house. There's plenty of room outside to fight. You've got the whole outdoors to fight in.

(LEE *tries to tear himself away, he crashes across the stage like an enraged bull dragging AUSTIN with him, he snorts and bellows but AUSTIN hangs on and manages to keep clear of LEE'S attempts to grab him, they crash into the table, to the floor, LEE is face down thrashing wildly and choking, AUSTIN pulls cord*)

*tighter, stands with one foot planted on LEE'S back and the cord stretched taut)*

AUSTIN

*( holding cord)*

Gimme back my keys, Lee! Take the keys out! Take 'em out!

*(LEE desperately tries to dig in his pockets, searching for the car keys, MOM moves closer)*

MOM

*( calmly to AUSTIN)*

You're not killing him are you?

AUSTIN

I don't know. I don't know if I'm killing him. I'm stopping him. That's all. I'm just stopping him.

*(LEE thrashes but AUSTIN is relentless)*

MOM

You oughta' let him breathe a little bit.

AUSTIN

Throw the keys out, Lee!

*(LEE finally gets keys out and throws them on floor but out of AUSTIN'S reach, AUSTIN keeps pressure on cord, pulling LEE'S neck back, LEE gets one hand to the cord but can't relieve the pressure)*

Reach me those keys would ya', Mom.

MOM

*( not moving)*

Why are you doing this to him?

AUSTIN

Reach me the keys!

MOM

Not until you stop choking him.

AUSTIN



I can't stop choking him! He'll kill me if I stop choking him!

MOM

He won't kill you. He's your brother.

AUSTIN

Just get me the keys would ya'!

*( pause. MOM picks keys up off floor; hands them to AUSTIN)*

AUSTIN

*( to MOM)*

Thanks.

MOM

Will you let him go now?

AUSTIN

I don't know. He's not gonna' let me get outa' here.

MOM

Well you can't kill him.

AUSTIN

I can kill him! I can easily kill him. Right now. Right here. All I gotta' do is just tighten up. See?

*( he tightens cord, LEE thrashes wildly, AUSTIN releases pressure a little, maintaining control)*

Ya' see that?

MOM

That's a savage thing to do.

AUSTIN

Yeah well don't tell me I can't kill him because I can. I can just twist. I can just keep twisting.

*(AUSTIN twists the cord tighter, LEE weakens, his breathing changes to a short rasp)*

MOM

Austin!

*(AUSTIN relieves pressure, LEE breathes easier but AUSTIN keeps him under control)*

AUSTIN

( *eyes on LEE, holding cord* )

I'm goin' to the desert. There's nothing stopping me. I'm going by myself to the desert.

(MOM *moving toward her luggage*)

MOM

Well, I'm going to go check into a motel. I can't stand this anymore.

AUSTIN

Don't go yet!

(MOM *pauses*)

MOM

I can't stay here. This is worse than being homeless.

AUSTIN

I'll get everything fixed up for you, Mom. I promise. Just stay for a while.

MOM

( *picking up luggage* )

You're going to the desert.

AUSTIN

Just wait!

(LEE *thrashes*, AUSTIN *subdues him*, MOM *watches holding luggage, pause*)

MOM

It was the worst feeling being up there. In Alaska. Staring out a window. I never felt so desperate before. That's why when I saw that article on Picasso I thought —

AUSTIN

Stay here, Mom. This is where you live.

( *she looks around the stage* )

MOM

I don't recognize it at all.

*( she exits with luggage, AUSTIN makes a move toward her but LEE starts to struggle and AUSTIN subdues him again with cord, pause)*

AUSTIN

*( holding cord)*

Lee? I'll make ya' a deal. You let me get outa' here. Just let me get to my car. All right, Lee? Gimme a little headstart and I'll turn you loose. Just gimme a little headstart. All right?

*(LEE makes no response, AUSTIN slowly releases tension cord, still nothing from LEE)*

AUSTIN

Lee?

*(LEE is motionless, AUSTIN very slowly begins to stand, still keeping a tenuous hold on the cord and his eyes riveted to LEE for any sign of movement, AUSTIN slowly drops the cord and stands, he stares down at LEE who appears to be dead)*

AUSTIN

*( whispers)*

Lee?

*( pause, AUSTIN considers, looks toward exit, back to LEE, then makes a small movement as if to leave. Instantly LEE is on his feet and moves toward exit, blocking AUSTIN'S escape. They square off to each other, keeping a distance between them. Pause, a single coyote heard in distance, lights fade softly into moonlight, the figures of the brothers now appear to be caught in a vast desert-like landscape, they are very still but watchful for the next move, lights go slowly to black as the after-image of the brothers pulses in the dark, coyote fades)*